



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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House of Education.—No news, except that we have the honour of entertaining Miss Beale (Cheltenham) among our Easter visitors.

Parents' Review School.—Work going on steadily. Will members kindly notice a misprint in the programme for classes ii. and iii. The publishers of "Aunt Mai's Annual" are Constable and Co., London, not Leeds.

House of Education Natural History Club.—Notes by M. L. Hodgson. Work for the month:—British Reptiles and Amphibians. *First week*, Lizards; *Second week*, Common Snake; *Third week*, Vipers; *Fourth week*, Tritons, Frogs, and Toads.

The Viper.—You will have no difficulty in at once detecting the difference between the common ringed snake and the viper. You see there is a sensible difference in the shape of the head, and also in the marking down the back. When you come to examine the structure of the two creatures more carefully, you see that the head of the viper is short and broad, with a decided neck, while the head of the ringed snake, on the contrary, is long and narrow, and the neck merges so gradually into the body and the head that the creature apparently has no neck. On the back of the head of the viper there are also some well-defined black markings, somewhat like a skull and crossbones. If the viper be killed and the head dissected, it will be found that there are two poison glands connected with the fangs on either side, these fangs can be depressed or erected by the voluntary muscles which control them; and this places the viper in the division that includes all poisonous serpents of this class, viz., the *Viperina*. The dreaded rattlesnakes of America also belong to this group. While the cobra belongs to the group, *Colubrina*, that have permanently erected fangs. The structure of the poison glands, and the mechanism by which the poison is injected into the wound, is most interesting. The fangs are situated just under the eye, and fold down into a groove between the teeth of the palate and skin of the head, lying with the points directed towards the throat, so that the food slides over them without touching. There are several young fangs lying one above another ready to come into use, so that should the fangs be injured new ones soon take their place. I have often heard grown-up folk and children say when looking at the rapidly flourished black forked tongue, darting in and out of the creature's mouth, "Look at its sting!" Now you see that a viper bites, but its sting is neither in its tongue nor in its tail. The root of the tongue is situated near the front of the mouth, and the tongue darts out of the groove, or notch, you see plainly in the upper lip, so that unless for feeding or biting, the viper does not usually open its jaws very wide, though, no doubt, they are usually represented with wide open mouth and fierce looking tongue. Down the back of the creature you see a chain of diamond shaped marks; these are invariably present, no matter what colour the viper may be, and they are of all colors from black to white, you may see all shades of grey and brown. If you compare the vertebrae before you, you will see that the snakes possess more articulations than usual; this gives great flexibility to the spine, and enables them to wriggle along at a tremendous pace. The progressive motion of snakes may be described as *rib walking*. If you compare the ribs of the frog with those of

the snake, I think you will agree that the frog has learnt how to do without them, and the snake how to make most use of them. On the under surface of the body the edges of the ribs enable the viper to lay hold of any asperities that may come in its way, however small, it would find considerable difficulty in moving on a sheet of glass, as you see the ribs would have nothing to walk on. The food of the viper consists chiefly of mice, but it is also very fond of young birds. A friend of mine found one gorged with young blackbirds, lying coiled up in the nest. I have already explained the process by which the creature is enabled to swallow food so much larger than the apparent size of its head and throat, so I will not take up time for it again. There are many queer stories of vipers and their young, you will see it stated that the young vipers rush down their mother's throats for safety when danger threatens. You must take all such tales for what they are worth. I know you would all run for your lives if I put a live viper down on this floor, and would think you must die if it bit you. I don't think any of you would, though a young child might. The poison is a yellow viscid substance, of an albuminoid nature; more is secreted in hot weather than cold. It is difficult to find an antidote which would neutralise the poison without injuring the blood, as you will judge by the following facts. . . . Vipers may be found on most of our commons and heaths, as well as in woods and fields, in fact almost anywhere during the summer months.

Natural History Club.—The Club is increasing rapidly in numbers. All the subscribers are most delighted with Mr. Rowbotham's charming series of letters on Botany and Geology. Full particulars of these may be had from the secretary, Miss Paterson, 28, Victoria Street, London, S.W. Mr. Rowbotham has this month reproduced the children's drawings, which form a very attractive supplement, and must prove a great encouragement to the children. Only the best of the drawings sent him are placed by Mr. Rowbotham in "the gallery," their reproduction is quite a marvel of patience and skill. Specimen copies of the letters may be seen by would-be subscribers.

The Girls' Games Club is now entering on its third year of existence, and with the new year I am making several alterations which may interest your readers. The Club was started to afford girls opportunity for outdoor physical exercise, which is so necessary if we want to counteract the hard mental strain they undergo. Hockey and Cricket are the games played, under the supervision of a skilled teacher. Our ground is situated at Wormwood Scrubbs, N. Kensington, accessible from all parts of London by omnibus or rail. We have now obtained permission from Her Majesty's Board of Works to play on a piece of ground in Regents Park (opposite Cumberland Gate) as well. This will open up a new district for members. The days arranged for are, *Senior division* (girls over 12), Mondays, Regents Park, 4.30—6; Wednesdays, N. Kensington, 4.30—6. *Junior division* (girls and boys, 8—12), Mondays and Thursdays, 4—5.30, N. Kensington; Tuesdays, Regent's Park. Fee, 10s. 6d. for half year, 15s. for the year. I shall be pleased to receive the names of intending members, who are requested to state the days and locality preferred.

H. FRANKLIN, Sec.